

# The Last Twenty-Four Hours of Lincoln's Life

By Clara E. Laughlin

Author of "The Death of Lincoln," etc.

## The Morning of the Day



**A**T BREAKFAST-TIME on Friday morning, April fourteenth, 1865, a young soldier came home from the war. His Captain's uniform showed service, his strong-featured, earnest face was weather-bronzed. It was the nation's most distinguished home to which he came, the home whereon the war had borne more heavily than on any other in the land, but the welcome given him was in no respect different from that which would soon be given by thousands of other American households to soldier-boys home from the war.

His father and mother and little twelve-year-old brother were at breakfast when he joined them, and though it was less than a fortnight since he had seen them all down at City Point, so much had happened in that fortnight that it seemed a very long time indeed, and there was much to ask him.

Particularly was his father anxious to ply him with questions about what had happened on Sunday—Palm Sunday—at a tiny Virginia hamlet called Appomattox.

"Father," said the Captain, his fine young face aglow with an enthusiasm splendid to see, "it was great! I wouldn't for anything have missed seeing it: the little, barely-furnished room, so grudgingly yielded for the meeting; the stately, elegant Lee, with his white head and his spotless uniform, his jeweled sword and gold spurs; the small, stooping, shabby, shy man in the muddy, blue uniform, with no sword and no spurs—only the frayed and dingy shoulder-straps of a Lieutenant-General on the rumpled blouse of a private soldier; the little group of hushed, awed staff-officers, stepping on tiptoe and talking in whispers; the silence in the room as the terms of surrender, those wonderful terms, were written and read and accepted; the salute to Lee as he rode away—the sadness of Grant as we went back to our army—oh, it was great! I never expect to see truer greatness."

His father nodded. His inexpressibly sad face had been lighted, as his boy talked, with a beautiful tenderness, part of which was for joy of the thing the boy related and part for delight in the boy's appreciation of it.

"I'm glad you were there," he said, "both for your sake and for mine; because, of course, there's no getting any details out of—him."

**T**HEN he told the Captain a little of the small, shy victor's arrival in Washington the day before, and of the demonstrations of the evening when the Capital went wild with joy.

"And tonight he and Mrs. Grant are going to the theatre with your mother and me," he went on, "and I suppose there'll be a great to-do over him there."

Pride of that shy and unexultant little man rang in the tones of his voice and shone from every line of his beaming face.

But there was another army still in the field against the Union, and he could not be quite happy until he knew that all bloodshed had ceased. So, after an early call from Schuyler Colfax, Speaker of the House, who was to start the next day on a Western trip, Abraham Lincoln took to his worn old trail between the White House and the War Office, and, presently, was hunting through the telegraph files for news from Sherman.

As he stood there the grim War Secretary came out of his inner office and looked at the President over the top of his spectacles. He was stern and unsmiling, and he spoke to his Chief without apparent deference either to the Chief or to the Chief's high office.

"That theatre project for tonight's a crazy one," he said abruptly, "a most unnecessary risk, with the whole city on a spree. Take my advice and give it up."

"Nonsense!" returned Lincoln. "Who'd want to harm me now? The war's over—practically—we're one people again. And what good would it do to kill me? Would Johnson—would anybody—feel sorrier for the South than I do? Could anybody feel sorrier for the South than I do?"

"Rubbish!" snorted the Secretary angrily. "The city's full of your enemies."

"Well! and if it is? Wouldn't I—wouldn't any man—rather die once, and be done with it, than die a thousand deaths through fear? Come, Mr. Secretary, you've croaked dimly about my safety for three years, and yet, somehow, I have managed to get through unscathed."

**T**HE Secretary turned on his heel and left the room. It was apparently no use. An hour later he was sitting at the weekly Cabinet meeting listening to the President.

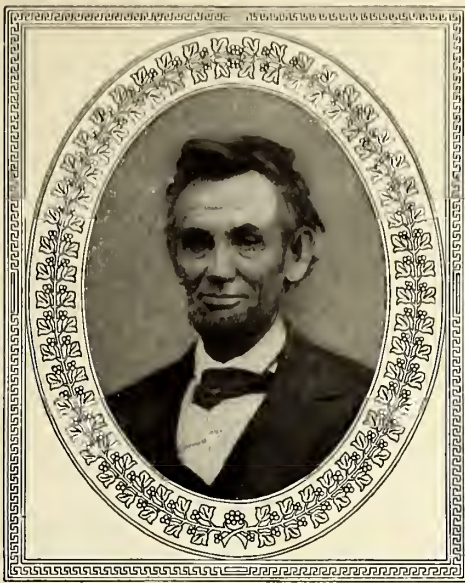
"I hope," the President was saying, "there will be no persecution, no bloody work, after the war is over. No one need expect me to take any part in hanging or killing those men, even the worst of them. . . . Enough lives have been sacrificed."

When the talk turned on Johnston's surrender to Sherman the President said he thought they would hear of it soon, because he had had, last night, his usual dream which preceded nearly every important event of the war.

"I seemed to be in a singular and indescribable vessel," he said, "but always the same, and to be moving with great rapidity toward a dark and indefinite shore. It must relate to Sherman this time, because my thoughts are in that direction, and I know of no other important event which is likely, just now, to occur."

He was a mystic, a seer, a believer in signs and portents, a man of implicit faith in the guiding and upholding of a Power much greater than his own. How, else, could he have dared to direct that war?

"You say you dreamed it before Bull Run and Murfreesboro, as well as before Vicksburg and Gettysburg?"



The Last Portrait of President Lincoln, Taken April 9, 1865, the Sunday Before His Assassination

DRAWN FROM A PHOTOGRAPH MADE BY ALEXANDER GARDNER. COPYRIGHT, 1904, BY WATSON FORTER. COURTESY OF S. S. MCCLURE COMPANY

It was the practical-minded Grant who spoke, the man accustomed to taking counsel of—himself—and going ahead. How, else, could he have fought that war?

"Yes," agreed the President, "but though Bull Run and Murfreesboro were not won they were great victories for us, in a sense, nevertheless. And one of the things this war has taught me is that sometimes when we seem to lose, we win most."

## In the Afternoon

**T**HE mid-April afternoon was lovely as only Washington in April knows how to be. It was warm and bright and blossomy, and the Potomac shone in the sun like silver, the willows along its banks were like soft, green plumes, the lilacs in the parks were out in white and purple splendor. The President and Mrs. Lincoln were going for a drive.

"To the Soldiers' Home, Burke," said the President as he stepped into the carriage. And over the old, familiar way to the Soldiers' Home they went, drinking in the balmy air and delighting in the gay bunting that draped dwellings and business houses and Government buildings in honor of this long-prayed-for peace that was so near at hand.

"We've had four hard years, Mary," the big, tender, whimsical man said to the little woman at his side—"four awful hard years. And I hardly dare to hope the four we're facing will be very easy—there seems to be a good deal of bitterness in the country—a good many persons who don't know the rules of the game when the fight's off. But when we're through here we sha'n't be old—I'll only be sixty and ought to have some 'go' left in me. And we've saved some money—we'll save some more. Then we'll settle down in Chicago or in Springfield and I'll practice law, and we'll live, quietly and cozily, to a nice, green old age. Doesn't that sound good to you?"

His rugged face was full of tenderness as he spoke, and of wistfulness—wistfulness of a tired man for the sweets of simple living.

When they got back to the White House they saw a group of gentlemen leaving, going across the lawn toward the Treasury; Richard Oglesby, War Governor of Illinois, was among them.

"Come back, boys, come back!" the President shouted, waving his long arms in invitation.

They went back, and the President took them up to his office on the second floor, where they sat, laughing and talking with him, till dinner-time. He had been reading a funny book which he was anxious to share with them, and he was continuously "reminded" of story after story of that wonderfully-pertinent sort that only he knew how to tell. In consequence, peal on peal of hearty laughter came floating out of the President's office, so recently freed from its pall of sad anxiety; and when, after a while, a servant came to announce the President's dinner, he replied, after an old, old boyish fashion: "In a minute." Presently the servant returned—several minutes had passed. "I'm coming," the President answered, but urged "the boys" not to hurry.

Finally Tom Peadel, the doorkeeper, went up and called Governor Oglesby aside, explaining about the theatre party and the necessity of dining promptly. And Oglesby "called off" the others, their host protesting as they left that he'd "much rather swap stories than eat."

## The Evening

**T**HE plans for the evening were changed, so far as the Grants were concerned. Early in the afternoon it became apparent to General Grant that he could get away from Washington on Friday night quite as well as on Saturday, so he and Mrs. Grant excused themselves to Mrs. Lincoln on the plea of their anxiousness to get to Burlington, New Jersey, to see their little Nellie, who was at school there. In the Grants' place Mrs. Lincoln had asked Miss Clara Harris, daughter of Senator Ira Harris, of New York, and her fiancé, Major Henry Rathbone. The President's carriage was to call for the young people and take them to the theatre.

After dinner, at which Captain Robert Lincoln was present, Mr. Colfax called again, and brought with him Mr. Ashmun, of Massachusetts. They had a brief talk with the President in the library upstairs. Then the President excused himself to get his hat and coat.

Stopping at the door of Captain Lincoln's room he said: "We're going to the theatre, Bob; don't you want to go?"

"If it's just the same to you, Father," the young soldier replied, "I'd a whole lot rather stay home and go early to bed. I haven't slept in a bed in nearly two weeks."

"All right, my boy. Do just what you feel most like. Good-night."

"Good-night, Father."

Thus, casually, they parted.

Senator Stewart, of Nevada, had called and brought with him a friend, Judge Searles, who was anxious to see the President. And to the usher who brought this word upstairs Lincoln gave a note for the Senator:

"I am engaged to go to the theatre with Mrs. Lincoln. It is the kind of an engagement I never break. Come with your friend tomorrow at ten and I shall be glad to see you. A. LINCOLN."

**A**LMOST on the usher's heels he and Mrs. Lincoln and their callers descended the stairs, and at the door he stopped and wrote a card for Mr. Ashmun, who also was disappointed that the President's evening was engaged and had been invited to come back at nine in the morning. This was an hour before the beginning of the official day, and lest Mr. Ashmun have difficulty in persuading the doorkeepers that he had an appointment the President wrote for him the last words he was ever to pen:

"Allow Mr. Ashmun and friends to come in at nine A. M. tomorrow. A. LINCOLN."

This he gave to Mr. Ashmun, then shook hands cordially with all his callers and got into the carriage. Ned Burke was driving, and Forbes, who acted as valet and footman, was also on the box. Parker, a special policeman who shared with Crook the duty of attending the President as guard, went to Ford's Theatre on a car.

After the young people were "picked up" Mr. Lincoln seemed to abandon himself most happily to the festal mood, and talked joyously of the good time coming, now that peace was assured.

It was eight-thirty or after when they reached the theatre, entered at the main door (which was near the south end of the façade), traversed the length of the inner lobby to the staircase, ascended, and retraversed the same distance in the upper corridor. The box habitually set aside for the President's use was a large one, made by taking out the partition ordinarily between two boxes and throwing them into one. This gave the honored guests more room and did away with any near neighbors who might annoy them. The boxes so used were the two balcony boxes on the right-hand side of the house as the audience reckons, the left from the actor's point of view.

As the distinguished party entered their box Miss Laura Keane, acting "Florence Trenchard," was trying to explain a joke to Mr. Emerson, who acted "Dundreary," the part originated by Mr. E. A. Sothorn. Poor, stupid "Dundreary" couldn't "see it."

"You can't see it?" said "Florence."

"No, I can't thee it," lisped His Lordship blankly.

"Well," glancing up at the state box which the President was just entering, "everybody can see *that*!" she said, and bowed.

Then the orchestra struck up "Hail to the Chief," and the brilliant audience rose and cheered.

**I**T WAS over in a minute or two and the play went on. Mr. Lincoln sat in a large rocking-chair in the corner of the box nearest the audience, Mrs. Lincoln sat next, then Miss Harris, and in the corner nearest the stage Major Rathbone. Parker, the guard, who was supposed to sit at the door to the passageway behind the box, got so interested in the play that he left his post and took a seat near the front of the dress circle, whence he could see. "Our American Cousin" was a famous play, written by Tom Taylor, a London wit and literary man. It was first produced by Miss Keane at her own theatre in New York in 1858, and was an immediate success, bringing fame and fortune to her and to two members of her company, Mr. Joseph Jefferson and Mr. Edward A. Sothorn. These actors were not with her after that season, but Miss Keane on that Friday night was playing her part for nearly the one thousandth time and the occasion was a benefit to her.

The first act was finished soon after the Presidential party arrived. The second act was rung up and played. During its progress the President got up and put on his overcoat, which he had hung, on entering, at the back of the box. The ladies were in evening costume and did not seem to feel any chill, but something made the big, gaunt man cold, and he put on his coat.

About ten minutes past ten, while the third act was in progress, a young man of extraordinary beauty passed Buckingham, the doorkeeper, and entered the house. "Buck" was counting his tickets, and to guard against any one's passing him while he was thus occupied he stretched one arm across the doorway. Some one came up and took the arm down as if it had been a pasture-bar. "Buck" turned and faced that winsome John Wilkes Booth, whom every one about the theatre—and elsewhere!—loved and humored. Booth grasped two of "Buck's" fingers and shook them.

"You don't want a ticket from me, do you?" he said, smiling.

It was too obvious a joke to need comment. Booth was as free to come and go about that theatre as if he



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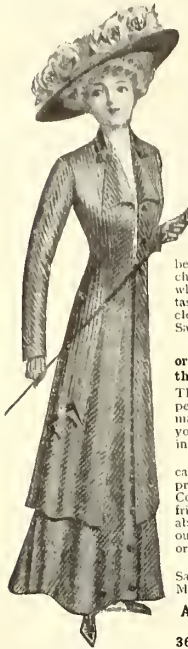
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## THE LAST 24 HOURS OF LINCOLN'S LIFE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12)

owned every inch of it, and this was the fifth time in less than an hour that he had passed "Buck," gone in and looked about, only to come, presently, out again.

This time he traversed the same route as the Presidential party had earlier in the evening, and passing down the aisle by the south wall of the theatre he came close to the doorway leading to the passage behind the state box. And there he stood, leaning against the wall, and watched the play for a minute or two. A few persons left off looking at the stage to look at him, and to whisper admiringly about his grace and beauty.

HE WAS the most talented of all the Booths, this boy of twenty-six, and he was his mother's darling. But whereas all belonging to him were intensely loyal to the Union, John passionately loved the South and espoused her cause. And he knew so little of the great heart beating close beside him, in the box there, that he thought it responsible for the war.

For seven months John and some boys he knew had been cherishing a crazy scheme to capture the President, as he rode about the environs of his Capital, hurry him to Richmond, hand him over to the Confederate authorities and recommend that he be held in exchange for all the thousands of Southern prisoners languishing in Northern prisons.

Nothing came of this scheme, of course, but disappointment and, presently, death and disgrace for the schemers. But that Friday, about noon, John heard, as he sat on the steps of Ford's Theatre reading a letter, that the President was to be there that night. Whereupon he thoughtfully folded and put away his letter and got up and went away. He was making up his mind—this gentlest and winsomest and most cruelly-misguided of boys—to kill the man he believed to be a tyrant and arch-fiend.

AT TWENTY minutes past ten there was but one actor on the stage: Mr. Harry Hawk, who was playing "Asa Trenchard," the part created by Joseph Jefferson. A designing old-woman character had just left the scene after a contemptuous remark about "Asa's" unaccustomedness to society.

"Society, eh?" said "Asa," looking after her. "Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, you darned old sockdolagging man-trap!" Mr. Hawk was looking up at the President's box as he said these words, and the shouts of laughter that greeted them were still ringing when a loud pistol-shot sounded through the house.

John Wilkes Booth had slipped quietly into the box and fired a small Derringer pistol close to the back of the President's head. The ball entered behind the left ear and lodged behind the right eye. Unconsciousness came instantly and never lifted.

Not one in all that crowded house saw the assassin enter the box or fire the shot. For a moment many persons in the audience thought the shooting was behind the scenes, a part of the play.

Then a woman's scream rang out, there was a scuffle in the state box as Major Rathbone grappled with the assailant, and in a space of time far briefer than it takes to tell it there appeared at the edge of the box nearest the stage a dark, handsome man, deadly pale, holding a dagger in his right hand. Major Rathbone, when his left arm was slashed by the assassin, had had to release his hold, and Booth made for the rail to leap to the stage—fourteen feet. But the despairing clutch he eluded was strong enough to spoil his agile jump and to "bungle" it, so that his spur caught in the flag draping the front of the box, and he fell, his left foot doubled under him. He was up, though, in a twinkling, crossed the front of the stage running wildly, and was gone, out the stage door into the alley where his horse was being held. Before any one could gather wits to give pursuit he had disappeared into the night.

### The Night, and the Break o' Day

THERE was no hope. The moment the doctors who responded to the call for aid saw the wound they knew it was fatal, and Surgeon-General Barnes, when he came driving madly up and saw where the ball had entered, confirmed their fears.

Washington was cobble-paved in those days, and the jolting ride to the White House was not to be thought of. So some one went out into Tenth Street to look for a near-by place where they might take him. The rooming house of one Peterson, a tailor, was across the street, and thither he was carried and laid on a low, walnut, four-poster bed, in a little room nine feet by seventeen at the end of the narrow hall on the main or parlor floor.

It was a plain, little room, rented just then by a young soldier doing duty in the Quartermaster's department. And into it came crowding, soon, the great men of the Capital.

Some watched by the bedside; some went with Secretary Stanton into the back parlor and took up the work of writing messages—apprising the nation of the tragedy, and taking steps to avenge it—and some tried to comfort Mrs. Lincoln and the young Captain, hastily summoned from the White House, who passed the night of vigil in the front parlor.

Out in the guarded street the heartsick soldiers tramped and tramped and tramped, keeping watch. Inside, the hours ticked slowly, solemnly away. At half-past three the President's pastor, Doctor Gurley, knelt by the bedside and besought Almighty God in prayer. At half-past six the breathing became labored and there were other signs that the end was not far off. At seven-twenty he was still here. At seven-twenty-two he was gone; the last feeble hold of the flesh was shaken loose, the great, gentle spirit was free!

Outside, a spring rain was falling, soaking the gay bunting of joy, while everywhere, as the news spread, tears flowed in such sorrow as the world has seldom known.

And up at the White House was a white faced little boy sobbing inconsolably: "They've killed my Papa-day."

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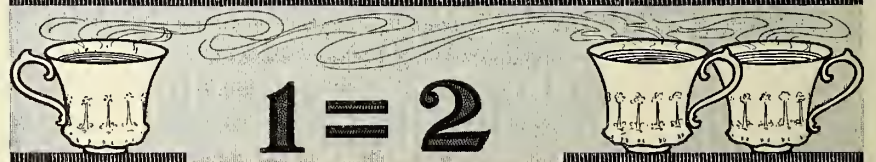
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